



## Major Group for Children and Youth

### Opening Statement - Operational Activities Segment

*Delivered by: Chelsea Antoine*

Thank you chair for the floor.

Excellencies, it is my distinct honour to address you today, both as a youth from Trinidad and Tobago, and as a representative of the Major Group for Children and Youth, or MGCY. MGCY is the UN-mandated youth constituency that engages more than 20 thousand youth organizations, in over 60 intergovernmental and 200 multi-stakeholder processes.

Let us ground ourselves in the theme of this segment: “Keeping the promise of sustainable development”. For children and youth, who are on the front lines of every human development challenge, the promise is deeply personal. It needs to be the UN's commitment that no matter where we are from, children and youth have a rights-based space in shaping the systems that shape our lives. That includes how the UN system operates, reports, and holds itself accountable in working with and alongside the people it serves. Excellencies, successful action is inclusive action, and transparency is the operational foundation.

**As we shape the lead-up to UN at 80, let me share these observations reflecting the experiences of thousands of youth organizations:**

**First**, we have seen the UN development system working to keep that promise. Across the Caribbean and globally, the UN has invested in youth leadership via capacity building, advocacy and mechanisms to engage directly with policy processes. Children and youth are increasingly involved in Voluntary National Reviews, co-authoring civil society inputs, writing shadow reports and pushing for youth-specific targets to be reflected in national SDG progress.

However, the data is clear: youth organisations are often the “**missing implementers**”. Youth-led organizations receive less than 1% of UN procurement contracts. This limits both their ability to scale innovative solutions and their ability to engage as rights-holders. This is why youth engagement in UN system accountability is critical, particularly through the QCPR and reporting structures, and deeper youth engagement in national level implementation.

**Second**, the QCPR calls for greater coherence, inclusivity, and effectiveness across the UN development system. Youth engagement is fundamental here. We highlight the need for UN Country Teams to engage with universal structures that are youth-led and not hand-picked, that reflect broad diversity of youth on a national level. Youth engagement cannot be tokenistic – not only because youth are rights-holders, but also because we will all miss out on the benefits of diverse youth voices and solutions. Those benefits only obtain from engagement that is institutionalized, long term and fully resourced. We also call upon UN Country Teams to ensure more programmatic coherence generally, especially on climate action.

**Third**, as we commemorate the UN at 80, we highlight that it must **build on and not discard the progress** we achieved during the UN at 75 process. Excellencies, **the future of**



**multilateralism cannot be built upon the military industrial complex.** In 2024, the global defense spending reached \$2.46 trillion, while \$100 billion per year of the climate finance goal was not met and the UN saw a liquidity crisis. We call upon member states to not invest in warfare but to invest in the future and thereby the UN's ability to deliver critical assistance to children and youth globally. We also call upon an immediate and permanent ceasefire to all conflicts globally.

**Fourth**, the ECOSOC Youth Forum - the largest convening of young people in the UN last month - has produced concrete youth-led recommendations which must be carried into decision-making-spaces, from RC offices, to UN agencies, from national SDG councils to QCPR follow-up.

As we open this Operational Activities Segment, we celebrate progress. Yet, we must also challenge ourselves and the system to go further, especially for those in the Global South, in fragile and vulnerable settings, and communities where voices remain on the margins. If we are truly committed to keeping the promise of sustainable development, that requires investing in those who are carrying the promise forward. Thank you.

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